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Obey Talks to local citizens about efforts

to shift budget priorities AND rein in THE war

7th CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, WI – Seventh District Congressman Dave Obey (D-WI), who as Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee has been at the heart of efforts to set a new direction for the country and to rein in U.S. involvement in the Iraqi civil war, hosted twenty meetings this week to provide an update on what has been happening in Congress with the war in Iraq and the federal budget.

Obey kicked off the meetings by noting that Congress has done two major things since Democrats took control in January: 1) significantly changed budget priorities, and 2) voted for the first time to rein in an out-of-control President on Iraq. “Those two actions alone clearly show that elections do matter and people can make a difference,” Obey said.

On the budget front, Obey told the crowds that, “Because the previous Republican Congress never got around to passing the domestic budget for this year, the first job we had to do was to rewrite those bills and make some hard choices about budget priorities.” Explaining that they cut more than sixty low priority programs and shifted about \$17 billion into high priority long-term investments, Obey said, “We made Veterans’ care our top priority by adding \$3.6 billion for the VA to provide for an anticipated increase of at least 325,000 patients and to meet rising health care costs.”

Obey said education was their second priority because college costs have gone up by nearly 25% over the last three years and Congress has done barely anything to help working families get their kids a quality education. “So we increased the Pell Grant program for the first time in three years to help over 5 million students pay rising college expenses,” he added.

“We also expanded funding for Community Health Centers to help over a million people gain access to affordable healthcare and we reversed the two year decline in medical research grants at the National Institutes of Health for diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer’s and diabetes,” Obey noted.

On Iraq, Obey noted that, despite fierce opposition from the White House, the House recently approved Obey’s bill to: 1) intensify U.S. efforts in Afghanistan against al Qaeda “the right war in the right place, instead of the wrong war in the wrong place in Iraq; 2) dramatically strengthen budgets for veterans and defense healthcare, providing a major increase in funds to treat post traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and to improve military and veterans hospitals to ensure that they can provide returning soldiers with the tools they need to overcome their injuries and reclaim their lives; and 3) for the first time since the war began, set a timeline for bringing U.S. participation in the Iraqi civil war to an end.

“I know some people would like to see us out of Iraq sooner. So would I,” Obey said. “But in order to win a fight in the House you have to have 218 votes. That’s exactly what we got, so I don’t know how we could have stretched the rubber-band any tighter without losing,

and leaving the President with a totally free hand.â€

He added that â€œwhat's important isn't the timetable or the standards; it's the Congress taking on the role of bad cop to drive home the message to Iraqi politicians that they must reach a political compromise, because our open ended occupation is over.â€

Obey concluded the meetings by noting that he would continue his efforts to change directions this year. â€œWe're going to continue to fight for a new course in Iraq at the same time that we fight for a new budget that puts healthcare and education at the top of Congress' priority list after too long an absence,â€ he said.

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